

**CITY OF NEWARK  
DELAWARE  
DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION COMMISSION MINUTES**

January 28, 2025

**MEETING CONVENED:** 7:00 p.m. Microsoft Teams

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Joel Murphy (Chair - Presiding), Richard Gaskins, C. Linwood Jackson, Tamesha Garnett, Sasha Aber

**STAFF:** Diana Reed, Deputy City Secretary  
Tara Schiano, City Secretary  
Paula Ennis, Parks & Recreation Director  
Jayme Gravell, Chief of Community Engagement (*Virtual*)  
Devan Hardin, Chief Human Resources Officer  
Jackie Etzweiler, IT Desktop Support I

**1. CALL TO ORDER:**

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Murphy, at 7:13 p.m.

**2. MOMENT OF SILENCE:**

Mr. Murphy recognized the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Holocaust and liberation of the Holocaust victims on January 27<sup>th</sup> and offered a moment of silence.

**3. ROLL CALL:**

- In attendance were Joel Murphy, Tamesha Garnett C. Linwood Jackson, Sasha Aber, and Richard Gaskins.
- Mr. Gaskins introduced himself as a graduate of Boston University and Wilberforce University with a strong background in business planning, financial planning, and diversity. After being the Vice President of Financial Planning at American Express, he became the Diversity Chief Executive for American Express Financial Advisors. He demonstrated in 20 different locations around the country how to leverage diversity, helping people understand differences between each other and helping financial planners learn how to be more effective and get more business. The revenue growth resulted in the company winning a Fortune 100 award. After retiring, Wyatt Pharmaceuticals invited him to join them to set up a diversity program. He specialized in setting up employee networks. He noted he has extensive intercultural communication experience, which he used for Jenny Smith Elementary School.

**4. PUBLIC COMMENT:     None.**

**5. APPROVAL OF NOVEMBER 26, 2024, MEETING MINUTES:**

MOTION BY MR. GASKINS, SECONDED BY MR. JACKSON: TO ACCEPT THE NOVEMBER 26, 2024 MEETING MINUTES.

MOTION PASSED. VOTE 5 to 0.

Aye – Aber, Garnett, Gaskins, Murphy, Jackson.

Nay – 0.

Absent – McCloskey.

**6. 2025 PROCEDURAL REFRESHERS:**

- Tara Schiano, City Secretary, offered a refresher on rules and regulations so all of the City's boards and commissions are following the same rules. These included:
  - FOIA provisions and regulations.
  - Send any documents to the City Secretary's Office (herself and Ms. Reed) to disseminate if they desire to go out to the rest of the commission. Title the email "D&I Items for distribution."
  - Include documents in the D&I's agenda packet 7 days before the meeting, as agendas will be posted 7 days in advance.
  - Remain realistic about agenda item times and only place items on the agenda they know they will be able to get through. Time-sensitive items can also be briefly discussed under Old & New Business prior to the following month's meeting. City staff may weigh in to opine whether an item is time-sensitive or not.
  - The Chair is responsible for ensuring the commission adheres to the timeline of each agenda item. Be mindful of when City staff are present to speak on items as they are being paid to attend.
  - Call on all participants to provide comments, in person and virtually, and gently notify any speaker if they exceed their dedicated time limit or stray off-topic.
  - Notify the City Secretary's Office staff member (Ms. Reed) as soon as possible if the D&I Commission wants to invite any staff member to a future meeting so their attendance can be coordinated appropriately.
  - Identify themselves by name before speaking on the record.
- The commission asked Ms. Schiano multiple questions on how early they could receive the minutes if staff can offer the commission contact information upon request (such as for the veteran's flag project), and if the meetings are being recorded.
- Ms. Schiano clarified the City Secretary's Office is responsible for writing almost every board and commission's meeting minutes and will try to get to them as early as possible; staff can provide the commission with contextual information about the individuals or topics they are discussing (such as a discussion in a meeting's previous minutes); and staff can provide members of the commission with the audio recording upon request as the D&I Commission's audio minutes are not posted for public view.

**7. DISCUSSION REGARDING CAMPS AND ACTIVITIES:**

- Paula Ennis, Parks & Recreation Director, described how each program and camp is advertised. Camps have limited spaces due to staffing, and the City has limited locations for each camp. The only demographics collected through registration are the child's age and sex. Resident registration opens at the same date and time, while non-resident registration opens a week later. Camps are filled on a first-come, first-serve basis. Individuals who cannot attend camps after they are full are put on a set waitlist.

- The commission had concerns about demographic information on the people who sign up for these programs and why specific individuals are unable to get into the programs before they are complete, such as being precluded from signing up due to financial reasons, technology accessibility, or being uninformed about the camps due not being able to access the advertisement information.
- The commission had general questions about camps regarding joint efforts between the City and third-party entities that also offer camps (the University of Delaware, Boys & Girls Club, the YMCA) and how children with disabilities can be accommodated so they can attend camps.
- Ms. Garnett, Mr. Murphy, and Mr. Jackson all supported the idea of a rotational system or lottery to give those who were put on the waitlist an opportunity to attend the programs of their choice. They wanted to pursue ideas to ensure that all children who wish to attend camps or programs get to do so.
- There was a consensus from the commission to direct Ms. Ennis to pull data from the program waitlists over the last three years and examine if any names were on the waitlist for multiple years.

#### **8. DISCUSSION REGARDING THE VETERAN'S FLAG PROJECT:**

- Mr. Gaskins recounted that he spoke with Newark NAACP President Dr. Freeman Williams, who informed him the Main Street and New London Road veteran's flag projects were separate projects, as those on Main Street were general veterans who were killed in action. The New London Road veterans were those who may or may not have been killed in action but grew up in that specific area of the City. He stated after he spoke with Dr. Williams and had a better understanding, this was no longer as strong of a concern to him as it was when he had brought it to Dr. Williams' attention.
- Multiple members of the commission were concerned that these were two separate projects and that the Black veterans would only be displayed on New London Road due to the potential public perception of segregation.
- Ms. Aber noted the previous recommendation made by the Diversity & Inclusion Commission not to have a separation between the two projects and was concerned this was not being heard.
- Jayme Gravell, Chief of Community Engagement, shared the same concerns of the commission but clarified that the City is only involved in this project in providing the utility poles to display the banners on. The Newark NAACP and Friends of School Hill (FOSHA) are the groups spearheading this project and were staunchly opposed to displaying the Black veteran's flags in other locations besides the New London Road area as this is Newark's historic Black community. She noted that the working groups behind the New London Road project heard the commission's recommendation when she proposed it but chose not to follow it.
- Mr. Murphy suggested tabling this item because the commission's discussion was effectively moving in circles.

MOTION BY MS. GARNETT, SECONDED BY MR. JACKSON: TO TABLE THIS DISCUSSION UNTIL THE NEXT MEETING.

MOTION PASSED. VOTE: 5 TO 0.

Aye – Aber, Garnett, Gaskins, Jackson, Murphy.

Nay – 0.

Absent – McCloskey.

**9. DISCUSSION REGARDING RELIGIOUS HOLIDAY DISPLAYS ON ACADEMY LAWN:**

- The commission agreed to discuss this topic early in the year to get the jump on this initiative for the 2025 holiday season. This initiative was initially brought to the table by Ms. Aber after discussing with Council the potential to display a menorah on Academy Lawn. It was the opinion of the Mayor that either all holidays be displayed or none should be displayed, including the holiday tree.
- Ms. Aber noted that the City has always responded to this initiative by saying that the holiday tree on Academy Lawn is non-religious, which she disagrees with. She recommended that the City investigate how other municipalities go about their holiday displays.
- Final Recommendation: “The D&I commission is making a recommendation for the City to see how other municipalities are displaying multiple winter holiday symbols for different groups and to report back to the Diversity & Inclusion Commission in February of their findings.”

MOTION BY MS. ABER, SECONDED BY MS. GARNETT: THE DIVERSITY & INCLUSION COMMISSION APPROVE THE RECOMMENDATION.

MOTION PASSED. VOTE: 5 TO 0.

Aye – Aber, Garnett, Gaskins, Jackson, Murphy.

Nay – 0.

Absent – McCloskey.

**10. DISCUSSION REGARDING DIVERSITY FESTIVAL IDEAS:**

MOTION BY MS. ABER, SECONDED BY MS. GARNETT: TO POSTPONE THIS ITEM UNTIL THE COMMISSION’S FEBRUARY MEETING.

MOTION PASSED. VOTE: 5 TO 0.

Aye – Aber, Garnett, Gaskins, Jackson, Murphy.

Nay – 0.

Absent – McCloskey.

**11. OLD/NEW BUSINESS:**

- *Items proposed as new business:*
  - Diversity training for the commission – *by Mr. Gaskins*. There was discussion about whether this training would be taken during a meeting or not. Ms. Reed offered that the commission could take this training outside of a public meeting as long as the public is

provided with such notice.

- Potential recommendation for the City of Newark to stand by its Diversity & Inclusion Commission in response to many entities recently withdrawing their Diversity & Inclusion programs – *by Mr. Gaskins.*

- ***Items proposed as old business:***

- Update to see the current status of the D&I Commission's logo – *by Ms. Garnett.*
- Follow up with Ms. Gravell about the previously passed Juneteenth funding recommendation – *by Ms. Aber.*

**12. ADJOURNMENT:**

Mr. Jackson motioned to adjourn.

Mr. Murphy adjourned the meeting at 9:03 p.m.

Jordan L. Herring  
Administrative Professional I

/jlh